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## FOLK-LORE OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GERMANS.

## I.

BEFORE describing the customs, folk-medicine, and folk-lore of the Pennsylvania Germans, it will be necessary to present a brief sketch of the people to which they relate, and to explain the origin of the dialect generally, though erroneously, denominated "Pennsylvania Dutch."

Swedish settlers appeared at Tinicum Island, on the Delaware River, about the year 1638, where they held possession until 1655, when they were displaced by the Dutch, who in turn (in 1664) were compelled to give way to the English. A few adventurers had already arrived and established themselves where Chester now stands, a year before the arrival of Penn in 1682. Previous to this, numbers of Germans from the Palatinate — Rhenish Bavaria — had been induced to come to England upon the invitation of Queen Anne, the object of the English authorities being the rapid colonization of the new possessions in America; therefore many of the immigrants who came with Penn, and during the following years, were retained for a greater or less period of time to indemnify that government for the expense of transportation and maintenance. Some sold themselves to settlers from the interior, for whom they worked for a specified time. Numbers of these German colonists were transported to Georgia and to New York, but most of them ultimately made their way to Pennsylvania, where their friends had previously settled.

During the years 1683 and 1684 the immigration steadily increased, and was represented chiefly by Welsh, English, a few Dutch, and, above all, by Palatines. According to Proud, some of these lodged in the woods, in hollow trees, and in caves and dug-outs made along the banks of the Delaware and the Wissahickon, while others hastily erected rude huts.

Thousands of new arrivals flocked in between the years 1708 and 1720, these being chiefly Palatines, with a few natives of Würtemberg and Darmstadt. Franconia, Baden, and Saxony were also represented at various intervals. Irish, from the north of Ireland, began to arrive about the year 1719, and the Welsh had been among the first to purchase land of Penn, selecting that on the west bank of the Schuylkill. Previous to 1692, the latter settled six townships in Chester County. The Irish, on the contrary, established themselves on the Lehigh, at a point between the present sites of Bethlehem and Allentown, which was long known as "Craig's Settlement." North of the Blue Mountains, near the Delaware, a few Dutch fam-

ilies from New Jersey and New York took up land, as did also a number of French and Spanish.

Philadelphia County was established in 1682, and on account of the number of Germans at the northern extremity of the settlement that spot received the name of "Germantown," which it still retains. From this point north and west the country was rapidly penetrated and clearings were made, so that during the eighteenth century all that portion of the State east of the Blue Mountains, from the Delaware to Maryland, contained thriving settlements and the beginnings of future cities.

Intermarriage between the various German immigrants, among whom the dialects of the Palatinate, Franconia, etc., predominated, has resulted in the formation of a dialect which is known as "Pennsylvania German." This more strongly resembles some of the Bavarian dialects than any other of the German, as was recognized by the present writer during his service as staff-surgeon in the Prussian army during the war of 1870-71. Although Pennsylvanians read German newspapers and books, they are generally unable to converse in that language, and experience great difficulty in understanding a recent German immigrant, whom they regard in the light of a foreigner, as much as do people of English descent.

German names were gradually Anglicized, so that few original forms, comparatively speaking, are now found. Some could not be satisfactorily treated in this manner, and were allowed to survive, such as Knappenberger, Lichtenwalner, Fenstermacher, Nunnemacher, Oberholtzer, Lautenschläger, Katzenmoyer, Trockenmüller, Himmelreich (= Kingdom of Heaven), etc. Others are found to-day, both the German and the English equivalent, possessed by different branches of the same family, as the following will illustrate:—

Schreiner	=	<i>Carpenter.</i>	Buss (= Busch)	=	<i>Wood.</i>
Schreiber	=	{ <i>Scribner,</i>	Rothstein	=	<i>Redstone.</i>
		{ <i>Writer.</i>	Klein	=	<i>Small.</i>
Dreher	=	<i>Turner.</i>	Jerk (= Georg)	=	<i>George.</i>
Schwarz	=	<i>Black.</i>	Hön	=	<i>Hain.</i>
Vogel	=	<i>Bird.</i>	Zimmerman	=	<i>Cooper.</i>
Vögeli	=	<i>Fegley.</i>	Becker	=	<i>Baker.</i>
Rothrock	=	<i>Redcoat.</i>	Ox (= Ochs)	=	<i>Oaks.</i>
Jung	=	<i>Young.</i>	Schneider	=	{ <i>Cutter,</i>
Haas	=	<i>Hare.</i>			{ <i>Taylor.</i>
Yeager,	=	{ <i>Hunter,</i>	Heffner	=	<i>Potter.</i>
		{ <i>Yeager,</i>	Herzog	=	<i>Duke.</i>
		{ <i>Faeger.</i> <sup>1</sup>			

<sup>1</sup> Of two brothers, one retained the original form, another changed to *Faeger*.

Another change is discernible in quite a number of names, *i. e.*, a change of spelling to simplify pronunciation, or to disguise or conceal ideas apparently absurd, as Wetherhold, from Wedderholtz; Balliet, from Pollyard; Hendershott, from Hinnershitz; Sheetz, from Schitz, etc.

Although impracticable, in the present paper, to treat of the philologic peculiarities of this dialect, it is necessary to submit a short scheme to facilitate in the proper pronunciation of such words and phrases as may be given from time to time. Consonants are sounded as in English; vowels are short, unless indicated by a line over the vowel prolonged in sound.

a, as in *far, tar*.

ä, as in *hat*.

â, as in *law*.

ai, as *ai* in *aisle*.

âi, as *oi* in *oil*.

e, as in *net*.

ê, as *a* in *ale*.

ch, as in German *nicht*.

gh, as the soft sound of *g* in *Tagen, schlagen*.

z is represented by *ts*.

c " " by *k* or *s*.

′, the acute accent, is used to indicate accented syllables.

ⁿ, the superior *n* indicates a nasalized sound of the letter to which it is attached. This sound appears to be one of the most striking peculiarities of the dialect, and resembles the nasalized *n* of the French language. The final *en* of all German words becomes *a* or *ä*, as *schlagen* (to strike) = *shla'gha*; *essen* (to eat) = *es'sä*.

It is extremely difficult for people of the rural districts to acquire the proper sound of *j* and *g*, as in the words *James* and *gem*, the usual result being *tsh*, as *ch* in *Charles*; words beginning with *ch* are sounded like the English *j*, and the final *th* becomes *s*, while the same sound as initial, in *this*, becomes *d*.

This dialect is still in common use, particularly in the country and small villages, though through the agency of public schools the English language is rapidly replacing it. As pronounced and spoken by the country folk, the dialect is frequently very amusing to those speaking it in the cities, as the former have a peculiar drawl or prolonged intonation not often heard in business communities, where everything is done with promptness and dispatch. There are marked differences, too, in words and phrases, so that one who is familiar with this dialect can readily distinguish whether the speaker be from Lancaster, or Berks, or Lehigh County.

The descendants of the early German colonists, after having

received during several generations the benefits of education and mingling in cultured society, cannot be distinguished from the offspring of other nationalities, and it is only in the rural districts, and in what is frequently termed the "backwoods," that we find the ruder and more primitive customs and superstitions surviving.

The country folks (*bush'lait*) are very averse to the adoption of the usages of polite society, and consequently adhere to many curious customs and manners with great tenacity. A common response, when questioned in regard to this, is, "As my father did, so I do" (*Wi dër fádër gedîn hôt, so du ich â*).

Occasional newspaper articles have appeared from time to time purporting to present accounts of the customs and superstitions of this people; but as the writers were generally not of the people, and in addition many were unfamiliar with the dialect, the accuracy of such descriptions may reasonably be questioned.

Many of the customs and superstitions are the remnants of what were imported into this country at the time of the first settlements, and it is only natural, therefore, to expect parallels in various portions of Great Britain and on the Continent. Still, the colonists had invariably to adapt themselves to their new environment; and as most of them had no money wherewith to secure the comforts of civilization, they began life *de novo*. Houses of moderate size were erected upon the clearings, usually having two rooms, sometimes three; the chimney being erected on the inside, as was also the oven. Windows consisted of small square openings, with a sliding board on the inner side, to serve as a shutter. Furniture of all descriptions was home-made and of the most primitive patterns. All clothing was made by the women, and they frequently resorted to buckskin skirts when working in the fields. Squirrel-skin moccasins were considered a luxury, and when the young women went to church on Sunday, in order to make them last as long as possible, they walked barefoot until within sight of the building before putting them on. In time, however, the condition of things and persons improved, so that the account which follows pertains chiefly to the early and middle portion of the present century.

Nearly every farmer raised sufficient flax or hemp for home consumption. The preparation of this, so that the spun fibre could be delivered to the weaver, entailed much labor and time, as many well remember. Wool was also prepared, dyed, and woven for garments and bed-covers. Dyes were made from the bark of trees and from plants. Sassafras bark produced a substantial yellow for woollen materials; a decoction of the bark of the red maple was employed, though a quantity of copperas had to be added. The bark of both the hickory and the oak were employed, chiefly for linen goods, and

the loose skins of old onions produced a light yellow. As a substitute for alum, urine was employed, and this was carefully poured into large vessels, until sufficient had accumulated for the desired purpose.

Barns, were then, as now, always larger and frequently more comfortable than the dwelling-house. The ground floor is divided into compartments for the stabling of horses and cattle, one end being left open as a driveway, where farm implements are placed during inclement weather. The main floor, extending over all, is usually from ten to twelve feet above the ground, and is divided into three parts. The middle third is reserved for threshing and the temporary storage of carriages and wagons, while upon either side are located the granaries, above which is stored the hay or straw. The roofs are of shingles. According to an old superstition, the shingles must be nailed on during the waning of the moon, or they will soon curl up and split. It is a common sight to find a horse-shoe nailed upon the lintels of the stable doors, to insure good luck and safety to the animals, and it is still better if the horse-shoe be one that was found upon the highway.

The writer is inclined to believe that this custom had its origin at a time more remote than the superstitions relating to "thirteen at a table" and the "spilling of salt," both of which are generally conceded to have originated at or with the Lord's Supper and consequent events. The Romans drove nails into the walls of cottages, as an antidote against the plague: for this reason L. Manlius, A. U. C. 390, was named dictator to drive the nail (Brand's "Antiq.," 1882, iii. 18). In Jerusalem, a rough representation of a hand is marked by the natives on the wall of every house whilst in building (Lt. Condon, "Palestine Explor. Fund," January, 1873, p. 16). The Moors generally, and especially the Arabs of Kairwan, employ the marks on their houses as prophylactics, and similar hand-prints are found in El Baird, near Petra.

That these practices and the later use of the horse-shoe originated with the rite of the Passover is probable. The blood upon the door-posts and upon the lintel (Exodus xii. 7) formed the chief points of an arch, and when the horse-shoe was invented it was naturally adopted by the superstitious as conforming to the shape, or outline, upon the primitive doorway, and in time it became the symbol of luck, or "safety to those residing under its protection."

The fence around the barn-yard, as well as others upon the farm, is also made during the waxing of the moon, or the posts will sink and soon rot away (Fayette County). In the eastern part of the State, fences must be made when the horns are turned up, when they will remain; if built when the horns of the moon are directed

downward, the posts will sink until the bottom rail touches the ground. So also with the planting of vegetables, etc. Peas, beans, and other plants growing as vines are planted when the horns of the moon are turned up, so that they may grow vigorously. If planted when the horns of the moon are turned down, they will remain low and stunted.<sup>1</sup>

Potatoes are planted in the new moon, so that they will have sufficient light and all strike root; "the sign of the moon must be in the feet" (Mr. Brown, Fayette County). The same authority also says that corn should be planted during the new moon, "when the sign is in the head," so that it may all go to ear. In Lehigh County, the first day of May was the day set apart for planting corn.

Cabbage should be planted on the seventeenth day of March, to insure its heading well.

Cucumbers must be planted in the morning, before sunrise, as otherwise they would be destroyed by bugs.

Wheat must not be cut before full moon, as it will not be fully ripe; "and if Ember-days are high [*sic*] one may expect to obtain a good price therefor." This last is from Mr. L. W. Brown, of Fayette County, but the description is not clear.

A curious belief is still extant in Lehigh County respecting the transplanting of parsley. Should any one obtain one or more plants, and replant them in his own garden, it is believed that such person's death will soon follow.<sup>2</sup>

It is but a few years ago that hogs were slaughtered during the waxing of the moon, as at any other time the meat would shrink and not be as good.<sup>3</sup>

It is still confidently asserted, in many localities, that the cattle kneel and low at midnight before Christmas.

To kill a toad or a barn-swallow will cause the cows to give bloody milk.

In Fayette County, according to my informant, Mr. L. W. Brown, "when a colt opens its mouth for the first time, it drops what is

<sup>1</sup> That a similar belief obtained in Great Britain is observed from the following passage in Tusser's *Poems* (printed 1744), quoted by Mr. Folkard in his *Plant Lore, Legends, and Lyrics* (London, 1884), p. 168, viz.: "It must be granted the moon is an excellent clock, and, if not the cause of many surprising accidents, gives a just indication of them, whereof this Pease and Beans may be one instance; for Pease and Beans sown during the increase do run more to hawm and straw, and during the declension more to cod, according to the common consent of countrymen."

<sup>2</sup> A similar belief obtains in Devonshire, England. Parsley was regarded by the Greeks as a funeral herb, and they frequently strewed the tombs of their dead with it.

<sup>3</sup> "Do not kill your pig until full moon, or the pork will be ruined," is a West Sussex superstition. *The Folk-Lore Record*, 1878, i. 11.

usually called a 'false tongue;' this should be picked up and suspended in the stable, when the colt will always be easily caught when out in pasture."

As counter-charms, the following are still believed in. When corn and beans are reserved for the next year's planting, the cobs, husks, and vines are carefully carried out into a field or upon the highway, that they may be quickly destroyed. Should they be burned, the next crop of corn and beans will be attacked by "black fungus" (*bräut*).

To exterminate briars and alders, cut them when the waning moon is in the "sign of the heart."

One will frequently observe, even at this day, the bodies of birds of prey, with outstretched wings, nailed against the gable ends of barns. Birds of this kind, shot upon the farm, were thus exposed to keep away others. A quarter of a century ago it was the custom for the young men to organize a party and shoot all obnoxious birds, and frequently those beneficial to the farmer, on Ascension Day. The origin of this custom, and the reason why that particular day should be selected, is not known.

Corn-husking parties and the merriment incident thereto is well known and indulged in even at this time, but there were also gatherings in the fields at night, after the husking had been completed, one of which the writer witnessed some years ago in Monroe County. In making a journey across the Blue Mountains, the summit was not reached until near midnight, and, just as the country beyond was dimly outlined in the moonlight, occasional strains of music and laughter could be detected floating up from below. Presently large fires were seen, and around them the rapidly moving bodies of the merry-makers. The husking had been completed, and a dance was in progress, — "a genuine jig," as it is termed in that region. The fiddler was seated upon a stump, while the couple who had the "floor" were stationed *vis-à-vis*, and in this position danced out the set, after which their places were taken by another couple. After several rounds, the whole party would promenade round the fire, which served both for illuminating the grounds and to furnish warmth, as it was late in the month of October.

When dances were held in the barn, light was afforded by lanterns and tallow candles. Husking parties (*husk'in mats'h'es*) were then held during the day, and the finding of a red ear of corn entitled the finder to kiss any one of the girls present; if a girl found such an ear, and wished to avoid being kissed, she would hide it quickly as possible, though, if discovered, the first of the young men to reach her was entitled to the kiss.

That curious custom of courting termed bundling still survives



in a few isolated localities along the eastern foothills of the Blue Mountains. It was rather common during the early portion of the present century, and survived and was considered a not improper practice even until the outbreak of the late war. It is more than probable that the young men discovered the absurdity and indecency of the custom during their enlistment, when they came in contact with more enlightened people, to whom such practice no doubt seemed criminal.

Among the uncultured this form of courtship was conducted with propriety and sincerity, but by the educated classes the proceedings were looked upon as decidedly immodest. No young man was esteemed a desirable beau unless he possessed at least a horse and buggy, so as to be enabled to take his sweetheart to local gatherings on holidays, and to church on Sunday.

Saturday evening was considered the proper time for courting (*shpär'iya*), though this delightful pastime often extended over the whole of Sunday. As before stated, houses were limited as to rooms; and as the distance travelled by the lover was often too great for him to return home late Saturday night, and to be at the command of his *fiancée* on Sunday morning, the matter was compromised by his remaining and sharing her bed. At sunset, the old folks were wont to retire, both to rest from the labors of the day and to save the unnecessary burning of tallow candles, which were home-made and a luxury.

The custom of bundling was, in early times, not confined to Pennsylvania alone, but extended into the New England States, as the following quotation will illustrate. William Smith, in the "Gentleman's Magazine" (1747, p. 211), says: "It must be noted that it is the custom in this country [New England] for young persons between whom there is a courtship, or treaty of marriage, to lye together, the woman having her petticoats on, and the man his breeches; and afterwards, if they do no fall out, they confess the covenant at the church, in the midst of the congregation, and to the minister, who declares the marriage legal; and if anything criminal has been acted, orders a punishment accordingly, sometimes of forty stripes save one."

In Pennsylvania, however, superfluous clothing was frequently dispensed with, and, if a like rule had existed, it would have been rarely found necessary to inflict such punishment.

That bundling received judicial recognition by the Supreme Court of the State of Pennsylvania is evident in the case of *Kenderline v. Phelin*, about the year 1852. This was on appeal from the case tried before Chief Justice Gibson, holding court at *nisi prius* in Philadelphia, who, in a decision on a point of evidence, ruled "that in that part of the country where the custom was known to prevail, that the

female being in bed with a man, or different men, was not conclusive evidence as to her want of chastity ;” and, on appeal, the decision was sustained.<sup>1</sup>

Another case, tried at Allentown, resulted in favor of the defendant, for the reason shown in the following extract from “The Pennsylvania Law Journal” (v. 1846, p. 30) : “In an action brought to recover damages for the seduction of the plaintiff’s daughter, it appeared that the defendant and the daughter slept together on the occasion of the seduction, according to a *custom* which prevailed in the part of the country where they resided (known as bundling), and with the knowledge of the plaintiff : Held, that the knowledge of the plaintiff amounted to connivance, and he could not therefore recover damages.”<sup>2</sup>

Thirty years ago it was common, at church, to see all the marriageable girls — or at least those who had lovers — wearing white scarfs or handkerchiefs around their necks, to hide the scarlet blotches caused by the kisses and “love bites” of the preceding evening. When visiting the larger towns, numbers of young couples would stroll along the streets with clasped hands or linked fingers, like children, totally oblivious to all comment from the amused lookers-on, and the writer distinctly remembers seeing such visitors sitting upon the butcher’s block, in the public market-place, clasped in each other’s arms and sound asleep ! — this, too, in the midst of a multitude of people who had been attracted to the town on account of a public demonstration.

The marriage ceremony was generally performed at the minister’s residence, and it was he, also, who furnished refreshments, consisting of home-made wine and small cakes. The bride and groom, sometimes attended by friends, usually went on horseback, and wedding trips were unknown to most people. Upon the return of the party to the temporary or future home of the newly wedded couple, dancing and other festivities were indulged in until long after midnight.

It was the custom for the bride to furnish the household linen, bedding, etc., the husband being supposed to have secured a house and plat of ground, either by purchase or renting. The habit was never to take an old broom into a new house, as bad luck was sure to follow.<sup>3</sup> It must be a new broom, and first carried across the meadow, to avert any evil consequences.

<sup>1</sup> This information, not published in the Reports *in extenso*, was given to the writer by a gentleman present at the trial and practising before the court.

<sup>2</sup> Hollis v. Wells, opinion by Judge Banks, Common Pleas of Lehigh County, August Term, 1845.

<sup>3</sup> A New England saying, noted in the *London Folk-Lore Journal* (1884, ii. 24), is, “He who proposes moving into a new house must send in beforehand bread and a new broom.”

Both at wedding feasts and upon other occasions it was usual, when dancing, to "dance for flax;" that is, the higher the feet were raised from the floor, the higher would be the host's crop of flax at the next harvest.<sup>1</sup>

The young wife, in the absence of farm help, often lent a helping hand in the heavy work of farming, such as plowing, threshing grain, clearing the fields of large stones, etc. From spring until autumn it was her duty, to gather the various herbs, barks, roots, and flowers supposed to contain medicinal properties, which were subsequently employed in domestic practice, as occasion required. Garden-seeds were also selected for the next year's planting, and, altogether, these various packages and bags, suspended from the rafters of the loft or garret of the house, formed quite an important and interesting collection. The subject of folk-medicine and the superstitions relating thereto will be presented later on.

"Quiltings" and apple-butter parties were looked forward to by the young folks with much interest. At the former the young women assisted in finishing bed-quilts, which consisted of many-colored patches of calico, and sometimes silks, the evening terminating with a dance and a supper; while, at the latter, much of the day was spent in boiling down cider and paring apples, which were subsequently reduced therein to the proper consistency. As this required constant stirring to avoid burning, the labors sometimes extended far into the night, and were then followed by a dance.

In some localities it is believed that if vinegar be disturbed while the apple-trees bloom it will again turn to cider.

With the exception of very few articles, nearly every variety of food was of farm production. Such as was obtained at the country stores was received in exchange for butter and eggs.

The housewife sometimes found difficulty in butter-making, the "spell" being believed to be the work of a witch, as every locality boasted of such a personage. The remedy was to plunge a red-hot poker into the contents of the churn, when the spell was broken, and the butter immediately began to form.

To refuse a witch any request was sure to be followed by misfortune. The following incident was related to the writer by Mr. A. F. Berlin, of Allentown, Pennsylvania, who received it at first hand. A farmer who lives at Alburtis, Lehigh County, had two cows. One

<sup>1</sup> In one part of Germany it is customary "for the bride to place flax in her shoes, that she may never come to want" (*Flowers and Flower-Lore*, by Hilderich Friend, i. 134). Another custom, from the same authority, is to the effect that a bride will "tie a string of flax around her left leg, in the belief that she will thereby enjoy the full blessing of the married state."

"Flax is the symbol of free and abundant vegetable life" (*Mythologie des Plantes*, by Count A. de Gubernatis, ii. 199).

day an old woman, who lived but a short distance away, and who was suspected of being a witch, came to the house, and, during the course of conversation, asked which of the two cows gave the greater quantity of milk. The one which was indicated was then with calf. Upon the following day the two cows were driven, as usual, into the fields to pasture, but on attempting to drive them home, later in the day, the milch cow was found lying helpless upon the ground. The farmer, upon hearing of this, went into the field with his sons, to endeavor to get the animal upon her feet. The sons took hold of the horns, while the father grasped the tail, but all attempts to move the cow were ineffectual. The father then directed the boys to gather some wood to make a fire, which was to be placed near the cow. During all this time the witch was standing on the portico of the farmer's house, watching the proceedings ; but the instant she saw that fire was to be kindled, she came forward, and inquired after the purpose of the proceedings. The farmer accused her of bewitching the cow, but this she denied most vigorously. The witch then bade the farmer call his wife, who, upon her arrival, was told to take hold of the cow's tail while the witch went to the head. After a few caresses and the utterance of some words of endearment and encouragement, the cow rose from the ground, and walked away as if nothing had occurred.

*W. F. Hoffman, M. D.*